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ABSTRACT

This study used data collected in 1974 from 48 desegregated Southern high schools to investigate the effects of the racial and social class composition of a school on racial tension as it was perceived by black and white students. This report is a preliminary investigation of trends in a continuing analysis of the data. Less racial tension tended to be perceived by lower socioeconomic status (SES) blacks, higher SES whites, and the racial group (blacks or whites) in the majority in a given school. More racial tension was perceived by higher SES black students in majority white schools than was felt by blacks in other settings. Lower SES white students experienced more racial tension when enrolled in majority black schools in which the black students were from lower SES backgrounds. The practical and theoretical implications of the research are discussed. Tables of data are appended. (Author/MK)

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Race Relations in Desegregated Schools of Different Racial and Social Class Compositions*

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This study investigates the effects on student race relations within a school of the racial and social class composition of the student body. The data were collected in 48 Southern high schools in 1974. The independent variables are school racial compositions (percent white), the socio-economic background of black students (e.g., lower class or middle class), and the socio-economic background of white students. The study investigates the effects of these variables on racial tensions within schools (the dependent variable). The study is especially concerned with combined effects of school racial composition, black student social class background, and white student social class background on racial tension. (For example, does one find more tension in majority white schools with middle class blacks and middle class whites than in majority black schools with middle class black students and middle class white students; or does one find more tension in these settings than in majority white schools with middle class black students and lower class white students, etc.?) The remainder of the introduction will consider the current state of our knowledge of factors which lead to positive race relations outcomes. Practical and theoretical reasons will be given which point to the importance of investigating the effects of the racial and social class composition of the desegregated school on student race relations.

St. John (1975, p. 64) notes that "Among the goals of school desegregation programs, the reduction of majority group prejudice is cited almost as frequently as the promotion of minority group achievement and self-confidence." Yet, despite the decades of research on the effects of school desegregation, we lack adequate understanding of the factors which lead to good race relations outcomes. For example,

> In sum, comparative studies of the racial attitudes of segregated and desegregated school children are inconclusive. Findings are inconsistent and mixed regardless of whether students' racial attitudes or friendship choice was the object of study, regardless of whether desegregation was by neighborhood or busing, voluntary or mandatory, and regardless of whether the study design was cross-sectional or longitudinal.--St. John, 1975, p. 80

> Why do positive interracial climates develop in some schools while negative climates prevail in others? What conditions affect the likelihood that a positive or negative interracial climate will develop in a particular school? We simply do not know...--Davidson, Hoffman, and Brown, 1978, p. 50, 51

Others who have reviewed the literature on race relations outcomes of school desegregation have reached similar conclusions (e.g., N.I.E., 1976). (The most optimistic review of literature in this area--which concluded that positive outcomes typically result from desegregation--is that by Weinberg, 1977.) Several explanations for this seeming disarray of research findings on race relations outcomes of school desegregation could be offered (see, e.g., Cohen, 1975). One explanation of this state of affairs is that different researchers have used different measures for independent variables and for the dependent variable, race relations. Another (and not contradictory) explanation will be suggested below.

In this confused state of affairs, the most widely used major theory of race relations, developed as early as the 1950's, has not been adequately tested (Cohen, 1975; Schofield, 1978). This theory is contact theory (see, e.g., Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1971; Williams, 1947; St. John, 1975), which focuses on equal status contact between the races in making predictions about the race relations outcomes of school desegregation. According to contact theory, good race relations outcomes can be expected from desegregation if the black and white groups involved: (1) possess equal status, (2) seek

common goals, (3) are cooperatively dependent on each other, and (4) interact with the positive support of authorities, laws, or customs.

Another explanation for the confused state of research results pertaining to the race relations outcomes of school desegregation is that too often research designs have lacked the appropriate complexity for gaining accurate insight into the complicated phenomenon of race relations (see N.I.E., 1976, Chapter 1). Research designs have failed to look carefully for certain interaction effects which may be important causes of variation in race relations outcomes. One such issue which involves the question of interaction effects and which has not been extensively studied concerns: the effects of different racial and social class combinations of students within a school on race relations and racial attitudes. This issue has to do with such questions as the following: (1) Is the probability of racial tension greater when middle class blacks attend school with white students of lower socio-economic class background; or when lower class black students attend school with middle class whites; or when blacks and whites are of equal (either lower or middle) social class background? (2) Does the likelihood of racial tension depend on the racial proportion (percent black or percent white) of student enrollment as well as social class mix? (3) Do different combinations of school racial composition and black-white social class contexts interact to influence the probability of racial tension? The present paper will explore this issue and the answers to such questions as these.

This issue--concerning the effects of different student racial and social class compositions on race relations in desegregated schools--is of both practical and theoretical importance, as outlined below.

The practical importance of this issue becomes evident when one considers current policies for making student assignments to desegregated schools (Bell, 1978). Such policies take into account the racial composition of schools, e.g., by making each school fall within a range which closely matches the district racial composition; or by maximizing the number of minority students in schools where their own race is not in the majority; or by selecting a "viable racial mix" within the range of 40%-60% minority. These current policies do not usually give careful attention to race relations outcomes--but may consider research suggestions or expert opinion about the likely effects of school racial composition on student academic achievement or "white flight."

Current policies for making student assignments to desegregated schools rarely take into account the social class mix of students. However, socioeconomic background mix may be as important as the racial composition of the school in creating a situation in which positive race relations can be developed (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1967). Thus, research evidence on race relations outcomes of different student racial and social class combinations can be helpful (1) as a guide to educators responsible for student assignments to schools; and (2) once school assignments have been made, in alerting practitioners to schools with higher probabilities of race relations difficulties. We need a better understanding of potential problems for whites in predominately black schools (Center for Equal Education, 1976), for blacks in mostly white schools (Epps, 1972), and for blacks and whites of a particular social class background in desegregated schools of a given social class context (Crain, et al., 1974; St. John, 1975, p. 78).

The question of the effects on student race relations of school racial and social class composition is also an important one for theoretical reasons. Using available theories of race relations (such as contact theory), it is not presently possible to predict differences in racial tensions for schools differing in racial and social class composition. For example, a 1974 study by a group of RAND researchers in race relations and school desegregation called for studies of such differences (Crain, et al., 1974; see also St. John, 1975), but were unable to predict from available theories how race relations would compare in schools with different racial proportions and different black/white student social class combinations. Thus, descriptive empirical estimates of racial tensions from representative samples of desegregated schools varying as to school racial composition and social class combination are needed; and will serve as a basis for extending our current theories on environmental conditions which influence race relations.

In summary, promoting good race relations is a widespread goal of school desegregation. Yet research evidence on what factors lead to positive race relations outcomes in desegregated settings is mixed; we do not yet know what variables lead to good race relations. In this confused state of affairs, contact theory, the most widely used theory of race relations, has not been adequately tested.

One reason for the relative paucity of our understanding of factors leading to good race relations outcomes may be the failure of many research designs to investigate the effects of the interaction of certain relevant variables in producing variation in outcomes. In this regard, an important and neglected issue concerns the potential interactive effects of the racial and social class composition of schools on student racial tension.

This issue can be of practical importance when student assignments to desegregated schools are made. The issue is an important one also for theoretical development in the area of race relations; empirical research on this question may help extend current theories, which are presently inadequate for predicting which racial and social class combinations are likely to result in most (or least) racial tension.

Procedures

The data used for the analysis reported here were collected in 1974 in 48 desegregated Southern high schools. An average of about sixty tenth graders in each school, including both blacks and whites, completed academic achievement tests and survey questionnaires. The data was collected by Educational Testing Service; for more details on research design and methodology, see Forehand, et al. (1976).

The analysis reported in this paper is a preliminary report of work in progress--and any conclusions reached are tentative and speculative. The final version of this research will use improved measures of the independent and dependent variables, and will provide significance tests for the pattern of interactions to be discussed.

For the current analysis, the surrogate measure of the black socio-economic status (SES) or social class context for a given school is the average score of black students in the school on a standardized achievement test (i.e., mean black achievement). In the same manner, mean white achievement in a given school is used as a surrogate measure of the white SES context of the school. The third independent variable--racial composition--is measured as the percent white student enrollment in a given school, as reported by the school principal. The measure of racial tensions in a given

school as perceived by black students is the percentage of black students who responded "no" to one of a series of items investigating school race relations. This item, which required a yes/no response, read: "Tensions have made it hard for everyone this year." The measure of tension as perceived by white students was the percentage of white students in the school who responded "no" to this item. (Note that this dependent variable measuring racial tension is coded in such a way that higher scores on the dependent variable mean better race relations--i.e., a greater proportion of students reporting the absence of tension.)

Table 1 presents means and standard deviations for these measures of independent and dependent variables. The discussion which follows will examine potential main effects of the school racial and social class composition variables. Next, an analysis of patterns of interaction effects among the variables will be presented.

Results

Two regression analyses were used to test for main effects of the independent variables Black SES Context (X1), White SES Context (X2), and School Racial Composition (X3). In the first regression analysis, the perceived tension of black students was regressed on the three independent variables; white student perceived tension was regressed on the independent variables in the second regression. The regression equation is as follows:

$$Y = a + B_1X1 + B_2X2 + B_3X3$$

where

1) X1 = Black Student SES Context
2) X2 = White Student SEX Context
3) X3 = School Racial Composition (Percent White)
4) Y = Perceived Racial Tension
5) a = a constant

The results of these regression analyses are presented in Table 2, which gives the beta coefficients for the independent variables in the multiple regression equation. None of the standardized regression coefficients is significant at the .05 level for either the black or the white equations.

Although there are no statistically significant main effects, it is worth noting certain trends in the data. Specifically, it is of interest to examine interpretations suggested by the beta for X1 in the black equation, the beta for X2 in the white equation, and the X3 betas in both equations. The -.204 beta for X1 in the black equation suggests that, after the effects of White SES Context and School Racial Composition are taken into account, black students of lower SES background tend to perceive race relations as better in desegregated schools than black students of higher SES background. Conversely, the beta of +.114 for X2 in the white equation suggests that white students of higher SES background experience better race relations in desegregated schools than white students of lower SES background.

An examination of the X3 betas of the black and white equations reveals a tendency for the racial group which comprises the majority of a school to feel less tension. The negative beta for X3 in the black student equation indicates that black students tend to feel less tension as the percent white of student enrollment decreases. The positive beta for the white student equation suggests a tendency for white students to feel less tension as the percent white of student enrollment increases.

The next and perhaps more interesting questions have to do with interactions among the three independent variables. E.g., which combinations of School Racial Composition, Black SES Context, and White SES Context produce most (or least) racial tension? Figures 1 and 2 address these questions.

Figure 1 shows first-order interaction effects for the dependent variable for black students and for white students. Indicated are the differences in perceived tensions in majority black schools (0-50% white) and majority white schools (51-99% white) for subgroups defined by the Black SES Context or the White SES Context of the school. The interesting result to note in Figure 1 concerns the dispersion of racial tension scores when majority black schools are compared to majority white schools. Figure 1 indicates that SES Context is less important in causing variation in the quality of race relations when a racial group is in the majority in a school than when it is in the minority. For example, for the black student data, SES Context influences the amount of racial tension perceived more in majority white than in majority black schools. The opposite is true in the white student data (but exactly the same pattern is reflected). The data for white students shows that SES Context matters more in determining the quality of race relations in majority black than in majority white schools. In sum, the SES context of the school matters more to the racial group which is in the minority in the school than to the racial group which is in the majority in determining the quality of race relations experienced.

Figure 2 presents second-order interactions of the three independent variables. It indicates patterns of differences in perceived racial tension for <u>combinations</u> of Black SES Context and White SES Context in majority black and majority white schools. Figure 2 shows a pattern which was seen in Figure 1--namely, there is a greater dispersion of perceived racial tension scores, for each of the two racial groups, in the schools in which that racial group is in the minority. There is a greater dispersion of tension scores for black students when they are in majority white rather than majority black schools. There is a greater dispersion of tension scores

for white students when they are in majority black rather than majority white schools. The SES Context of the school matters more for the racial group which is in the minority than for the one in the majority in determining quality of race relations experienced.

Figure 2 also permits the identification of which racial and social class compcsitions are most problematic for black students and for white students. For black students, Figure 2 shows that the likelihood of perceived racial tension is greatest when the Black SES Context is high--and especially when it is in combination with a White SES Context which is low. In the white student data, one racial and social class composition stands out as particularly troublesome: the combination of low Black SES Context and low White SES Context in a majority black school. White students are likely to perceive more tension in this combination than in any other.

In summary, the following trends were observed in the data. The data suggested a weak tendency for lower SES blacks to perceive better race relations in desegregated schools than higher SES blacks; and for higher SES whites to perceive less racial tension than lower SES whites. The racial group which is in the majority in a school appears to feel race relations are of higher quality than the racial group which is in the minority. For the group which is in the racial minority in a school, rather than the group which comprises the racial majority, the SES Context of the school exerts greater influence in determining how the quality of race relations is perceived. The most problematic situations for black students, with regard to the amount of racial tension they perceive, appear to be cases of majority white schools where Black SES Context is high. Particularly problematic is the combination of high Black SES Context and low White SES Context in a majority white school. The combination which stands out as

especially problematic with regard to the perception of racial tension by white students is the case of a majority black school with a low Black SES Context and a low White SES Context.

Discussion

This analysis has practical implications for educational policy makers. The independent variables of this investigation--Black SES Context, White SES Context, and School Racial Composition--are structural variables which may sometimes be manipulated in practice. For example, educators involved with decisions concerning making student assignments to desegregated schools may sometimes find it feasible to manipulate the Black SES Context, White SES Context, and Racial Composition of schools in such a way as to obtain the best and avoid the worst combinations of these factors. In cases in which it is not possible to avoid making student assignments to desegregated schools that are likely to lead to racial tension, knowledge of the likelihood of tensions will facilitate the early creation of plans for dealing with problems which might arise.

In this regard, the analysis reported here would indicate that educational policy makers should be especially cautious when student assignments to desegregated schools will result in a low White SES Context. This would appear to be the single component of the school environment variables which is most likely to be associated with perceived racial tensions. Recall from the analysis above (see Figure 2) that the school environmental context that resulted in most racial tension as perceived by black students was the combination of high Black SES Context and low White SES Context in majority white schools. For perceived tension by white students, low White SES Context is also troublesome in its effects. White students perceived most tension in the combination of low Black SES Context and low White SES Context in majority black schools.

The findings reported above suggest that educational policy makers should also focus special attention on the racial group which is in the minority in a school. Recall, for example, that the school SES context was more important for the racial minority than for the racial majority in determining variation in the quality of race relations experienced. Recall also (Figure 2) that black students perceived tensions as highest in majority white schools with high Black SES Context; and poorest race relations as perceived by whites were found in majority black schools with low Black SES Context and low White SES Context.

The results reported here provide a challenge and a starting point for improving theories of race relations. Improved theories of race relations are needed to empower educational practitioners with the tools needed to ensure positive race relations outcomes for different combinations of school Black SES Context, White SES Context, and Racial Composition. Future research and theory are needed to address issues such as the following.

Given that different combinations of school Black SES Context, White SES Context, and Racial Composition result in different race relations outcomes as perceived by black students and by white students, what social psychological processes are set in motion by these different combinations to cause these variable outcomes for perceived racial tension? For example, how well does the level of tension perceived correspond with actual behavioral instances of racial conflict or violence? Figure 2 indicates that black students of high SES background in majority white schools tend to perceive more tension than other black students. Do such black students actually encounter more behavioral instances of racial rejection, hostility, or violence than other black students? (If so, what processes tend to cause this to happen?) Or, alternatively, is it the case that higher SES blacks in

majority white schools have "higher standards" for judging the quality of race relations than other blacks? That is, compared to other blacks, are higher SES blacks in majority white schools more demanding of equal status treatment from whites and more sensitive in perceiving when such treatment is lacking?

Similar questions might be asked regarding the perception of tension by lower SES whites. What are the social psychological processes which cause lower SES white students to respond to differences in the racial and social class composition of schools with greater extremes of perceived tension than other whites (see Figure 2)? Compared to other whites, do lower SES whites feel more subjective threat to their status by black students in particular situations--even though they experience no more behavioral racial conflicts or racial violence than other whites? Or, alternatively, are lower SES whites more likely than other whites to be the source of higher levels of behavioral incidents of interracial conflict under certain conditions? If so, what social psychological dynamics would account for this? To develop better theories of the effects of contact between blacks and whites, future research is needed which can examine differences between subjective (or perceived) and objective (or behavioral) sources of interracial strain.

Future research is also needed to determine if the pattern of relationships reported here is altered when controls for certain other variables are employed. With regard to this, two variables of particular interest are region (e.g., North/South) and stability (or rapidity of change) of the school environmental context. Historically, the experience of school desegregation in the North contrasts with that in the South in that desegregated

schools in the North more typically resulted from changing residential patterns rather than court orders (N.I.E., 1976, Chapter 1). Would such differences in the origins of desegregation affect the racial climate in schools such that the pattern of relationships reported here for Southern schools--for the effects of Black SES Context, White SES Context, and School Racial Composition on racial tension--would change? Future research on such potential North/South differences as this is needed.

Another factor which might be expected to influence the pattern of relationships found here is the stability of the desegregated school environment--or the rapidity with which changes occur from year to year in the school's Racial Composition, Black SES Context, and White SES Context. For example, Davidson, et al. (1978) found that schools with fairly stable racial compositions over a number of years tended to have better interracial climates than schools which experienced more rapid changes (e.g., shifting from majority white to majority black) in racial composition. Future research should provide additional evidence on this matter.

In summary, the independent variables studied here--school Black SES Context, White SES Context, and Racial Composition--are structural variables which may sometimes be manipulated in practice to produce the most favorable outcomes for race relations and to avoid those which are likely to be most problematic. In cases where such avoidance is not possible, foreknowledge of the likelihood of racial tension will be useful in pointing to the necessity for early preparation of plans to handle problems which might arise. Educators responsible for making student assignments to desegregated schools should give special attention to the group which will be in the racial minority in a school, and to the potential problems of white students in schools with a low White SES Context.

Better research evidence and theory are needed to determine what factors lead to positive outcomes for interracial contact in desegregated schools. Given that different combinations of Black SES Context, White SES Context, and School Racial Composition produce different race relations outcomes, what are the causes of these variations in outcomes? I.e., what social psychological processes are at work to produce these differential outcomes? In particular, it is of interest to know if differences in perceived racial tension correspond to differences in actual behavioral interracial conflict. Finally, future research is needed to investigate whether the pattern of relationships reported here changes when controls for other variables (e.g., region, and stability of the school environmental context variables) are introduced.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of
Variables used in Multiple Regression Analyses

	Mean	Standard Deviation
X1 = Black SES Context	227.2	58.0
X2 = White SES Context	345.2	51.1
X3 = School Racial Composition	63.0	20.2
Perceived tension by Blacks	47.3	16.8
Perceived tension by Whites	46.1	20.7

Black SES Context is measured by School Mean of Black Achievement.

White SES Context is measured by School Mean of White Achievement.

School Racial Composition is measured by Percent White Student Enrollment

Perceived Tension by Blacks is measured by Percent of Black students in the school who report "no" to the item "Tensions have made it hard for everyone at school this year."

Perceived Tension by Whites is measured by Percent of White students in the school who report "no" to the item "Tensions have made it hard for everyone at school this year."

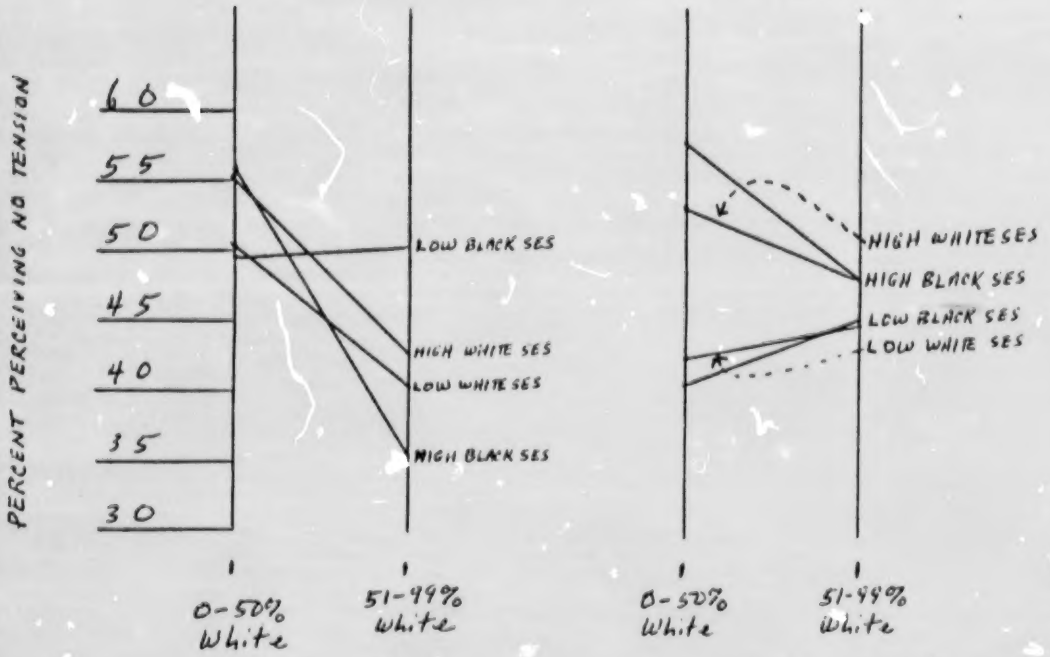
Table 2

Summary of Multiple Regressions of Perceived Tension on (X1) Black SES Context, (X2) White SES Context, and (X3) School Racial Composition, by Race

(B = Standardized Regression Coefficient; t = test statistic)

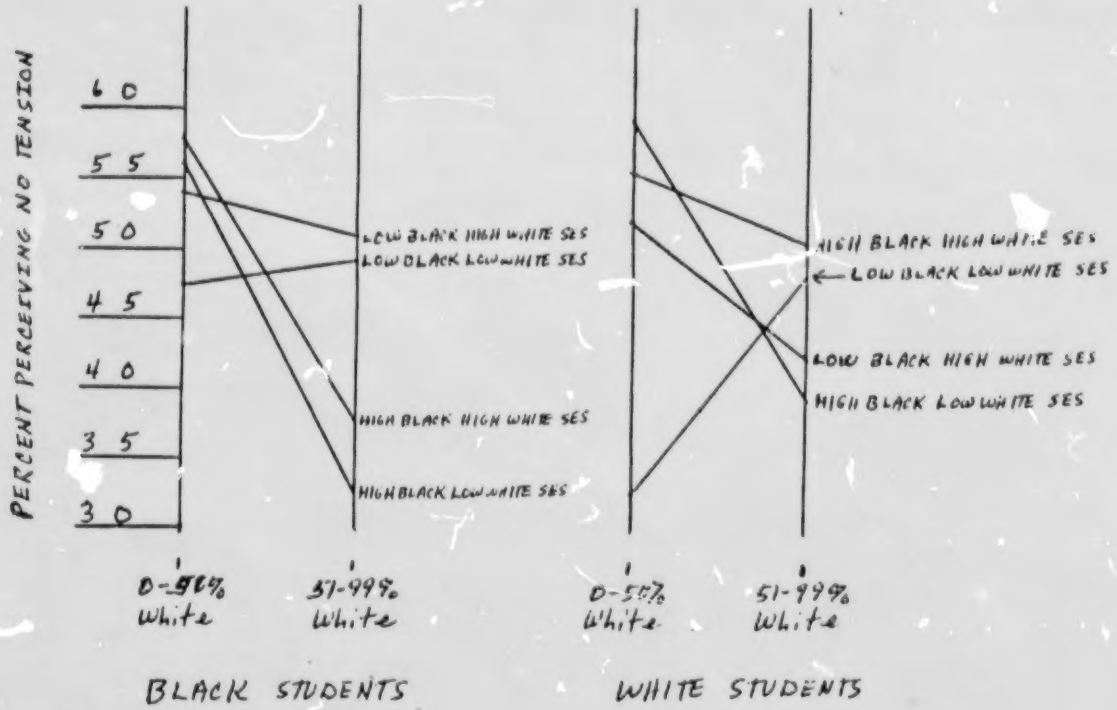
Dependent Variable	Independent Variables					
	X1 Black SES Context		X2 White SES Context		X3 School Racial Composition	
	B	(t)	B	(t)	B	(t)
Low Tension Perceived by Blacks	-.204	(-1.41) n.s.	-.091	(-0.62) n.s.	-.069	(-0.47) n.s.
Low Tension Perceived by Whites	.022	(0.15) n.s.	.114	(0.78) n.s.	.150	(1.03) n.s.

FIGURE 1: FIRST ORDER INTERACTIONS *



* EACH POINT ON THE GRAPH IS THE PERCENT OF THE STUDENTS IN THAT SUBGROUP REPORTING NO TENSION. SES INDEPENDENT VARIABLES WERE DICHOTOMIZED AT THE MEDIAN; PERCENT WHITE INDEPENDENT VARIABLE WAS DICHOTOMIZED AT 50%

FIGURE 2: SECOND ORDER INTERACTIONS *



* EACH POINT ON THE GRAPH IS THE PERCENT OF THE STUDENTS IN THAT SUBGROUP REPORTING NO TENSION. SES INDEPENDENT VARIABLES WERE DICHOTOMIZED AT THE MEDIAN; THE PERCENT WHITE INDEPENDENT VARIABLE WAS DICHOTOMIZED AT 50%

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